

## **Reimagining Public Safety Study Final Report November 2, 2021**

**RECOMMENDATION:** The REIMAGINING PUBLIC SAFETY STUDY should be terminated. The League should use the current issue statements available for the state and national to take positions on pending legislation. Local Leagues should consider involvement with their local counties and cities on moving public safety issues to the forefront. Finally, we hope for further clarification on public safety issues at the 2022 National Convention.

### **OVERVIEW:**

While the Reimagining Public Safety Study did meet over the last year, participation was lackluster, and all local Leagues were not consistently represented. That is not to say that the active members did not fulfill their mission

They interviewed:

- Mike Vance, Seward Co. sheriff
- Willie Barney, Empowerment Network
- Dr. Justin Nix, UNO, Criminal Justice
- Sam Petto, ACLU
- Bear Alexander, Omaha Community Activist
- Dr. Sam Walker, UNO, Criminal Justice (Ret.)
- Dr. Dawn Irlbeck, Creighton, Criminal Justice
- Karen Bell Dancy, YMCA, Lincoln
- Mary Ann Borgeson, Douglas County Commissioner

They watched the following videos:

- Jasmine L. Harris explain “Defunding the Police” on the LWVGO Annual Meeting breakout session:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUoy3SfbNOQ&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUoy3SfbNOQ&feature=emb_logo)
- Moving People 2 Action. “The People are Rising, Policing to Serve & Protect.” 22 October, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u05h3z4suig.eaming>
- **Judiciary Hearing testimony on Public Safety Bills 2/3/21.**  
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1DmgOxHVZuuthktQzco2iN7lvYEK7tK0k/edit?usp=sharing&oid=116779709418742225481&rtpof=true&sd=true> **This included LB51 the compromise bill** Change provisions relating to qualifications, training, certification, accreditation, powers, and duties of certain law enforcement personnel, signed into law May 26, 2021
- LWVGO. “Lunch & Learn” on Stopping the Prison Plan with Danielle Conrad of ACLU of NE.” 18 March 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=co4SP-K48k0>.
- LWVLL. “Lunch & Learn” by Dr. Jeanette Jones, Associate Professor of History and Ethnic Studies, University of Nebraska - Lincoln, "Can't Trust it: Race, Policing, the

Prison Industrial Complex".” 13 March 2021,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTzPxxwZ5fWM>.

They reviewed the following programs across the country:

- 8 Can't Wait Program <https://8cantwait.org/>
- CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets), Oregon Program <https://whitebirdclinic.org/cahoots/>
- League of Women Voters of California. “Criminal Justice Position.” *Criminal Justice Reform*, LWVC, <https://lwvc.org/our-work/positions/position-criminal-justice>. Accessed 19 October 2020.

And submitted 40 articles for review.

The participants identified these particular areas of concern/potential ideas (in no particular order):

- Lack of training for law enforcement in rural Nebraska (*Beginning to be addressed in LB51*)
- Small representation of minorities in Law Enforcement in Rural Nebraska even when the area has a minority population of up to 30%.
- Small county jails in Nebraska not meeting Nebraska jail standards
- Mental health professionals should be part of every law enforcement agency at the precinct or other small group level in order to be available to respond to calls.
- Crisis intervention training should be mandatory for all law enforcement staff.
- Train 911 operators to ask callers if mental health/social service staff are needed in addition to or instead of law enforcement officers for situations where such staff may be appropriate, and to relate the responses to dispatchers.
- Train law enforcement officers in how to listen to family members or others who are familiar with the situation in order to de-escalate or diffuse the situation.
- Implement programs like CAHOOTS (from Eugene, OR) that fully integrate mental health/social service staff in law enforcement calls.
- Enhance quality police training (*More state funding necessary*)
- Use of alternatives to incarceration – mental health court, drug courts, restitution, probation etc.
- Change specific practices for law enforcement, including: ban chokeholds and chemical weapons, make body cameras mandatory, (*some issues addressed in LB51*)
- Establish, support and expand wellness, resiliency and mental health support for law enforcement professionals. Actively dispel stigma associated with seeking assistance.
- Remove protections for inappropriate behavior by law enforcement.
- End qualified immunity
- Support legislation requiring racial impact statements in Nebraska laws (*we will be working on this issue in the upcoming session*)
- Implement and support diversion programs, implement policies to decrease pre-trial detention
- Require 4-year degree for law enforcement candidates.

- Establish community support liaisons networks for citizens to consult before involving law enforcement.
- Oversight boards be drawn from the community to vet citizen complaints
- Exorbitant pricing of jail & prison calls.
- Local leagues should consider instituting programs to learn more about how their local correctional facilities or local law enforcement work and include speakers from the organization for family members of people who are prisoners
- Local leagues may want to investigate county & municipality public safety agencies status on:
  - Cooperation with mental health service providers.
  - In house hiring for mental health programs.
  - Specific training offered in dealing with mental health.
  - This could help replicate successful programs across the state.

**As we found with last session’s public safety, prison reform and mental health bills in the Nebraska Legislature, there seems to be sufficient provisions in Impact on Issues and Nebraska program to weigh in on most issues. These include the following:**

***Impact on Issues:***

**EQUALITY PROVISION:** The League of Women Voters of the United States supports equal rights for all under state and federal law. P. 115

**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH:** The League supports:

- Behavioral health as the nationally accepted term that includes both mental illness and substance use disorder.
- Access for all people to affordable, quality in- and out-patient behavioral health care, including needed medications and supportive services.
- Effective re-entry planning and follow-up for people released from both behavioral health hospitalization and the criminal justice system.
- Problem solving or specialty courts, including mental health and drug courts, in all judicial districts to provide needed treatment and avoid inappropriate entry into the criminal justice system. pp. 130-131

**VIOLENCE PREVENTION:** The League of Women Voters of the United States supports violence prevention programs in all communities and action to support:

- Public and private development and coordination of programs that emphasize the primary prevention of violence;
- The active role of government and social institutions in preventing violent behavior; (NOTE THIS SHOULD INCLUDE THE POLICE) and
- The allocation of public monies in government programs to prevent violence. P. 143

**GUN POLICY:** The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that the proliferation of handguns and semi-automatic assault weapons in the United States is a major health and

safety threat to its citizens. The League supports strong federal measures to limit the accessibility and regulate the ownership of these weapons by private citizens. The League supports regulating firearms for consumer safety. P.144

**DEATH PENALTY:**

The League of Women Voters of the United States supports the abolition of the death penalty. P. 147

**SENTENCING POLICY:**

LWVUS believes alternatives to imprisonment should be explored and utilized, taking into consideration the circumstance. P. 148

**HUMAN TRAFFICKING:** The League of Women Voters opposes all forms of domestic and international human trafficking of adults and children, including sex trafficking and labor trafficking. We consider human trafficking to be a form of modern-day slavery and believe that every measure should be taken and every effort should be made through legislation and changes in public policy to prevent human trafficking. Prosecution and penalization of traffickers and abusers should be established, and existing laws should be strictly enforced. Extensive essential services for victims should be applied where needed. Education and awareness programs on human trafficking should be established in our communities and in our schools. P. 148.

***Nebraska Program:***

**CORRECTIONS:** The League of Women Voters of Nebraska supports a correctional system which provides for realistic and humane treatment of the accused and sentenced offender both juvenile and adult, as well as for the protection of the community. In order to achieve such a system, the League advocates the use of community-based alternatives to incarceration and the separation of corrections from law enforcement.—Adopted 1975, *Alternatives to Incarceration*, -updated 1984, amended 1993, 2016. Specifically, the League supports:

1. Diversion of offenders from the criminal justice system to appropriate programs;
2. Decriminalizing certain victimless crimes when alternative programs and facilities are feasible;
3. Improved and increased use of a variety of pre-trial release procedures;
4. The principle that juveniles be heard in juvenile court and held in facilities specifically designed for juvenile offenders;
5. A probation system comprising an adequate professional staff as well as volunteers;
6. Institutional programs aimed at reintegrating the offender into the community;
7. A central state agency to set minimum jail standards and to coordinate local correctional administration;
8. Removal of payment to jailer based on number of prisoners confined; and
9. A system which insures the preservation of civil and human rights of pre-trial detainees and which insures basic human rights of sentenced offenders.
10. 10 Abolition of the death penalty. p. 5-6

**VIOLENCE PREVENTION:** The League of Women Voters of Nebraska supports policies and programs at all levels of the community and government that serve to prevent violence in the home and in the community. These include:

Programs and services for the prevention of child abuse and intervention;

1. Family support services for violence prevention and intervention;
2. Public and private development and coordination of programs that emphasize the prevention of violence;
3. The active role of government and social institutions in preventing violent behavior; and
4. The allocation of public monies in government programs to prevent violence.—Adopted 2000. p. 7

**MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE:** Supports an adequately funded mental and behavioral health care system which provides comprehensive and coordinated services for children and adults with mental and behavioral health disorders. Supports state and local policies and programs which provide the opportunity for persons with mental and behavioral health disorders to achieve optimal management of their illness. —Adopted 2004, amended 2021.

Specifically, the League supports:

1. Behavioral health as the nationally accepted term that includes both mental illness and substance use disorder;
2. Access for all people to affordable, quality in- and out-patient behavioral health care, including needed medications and supportive services;
3. Behavioral health care that is integrated with, and achieves parity with, physical health care;
4. Early and affordable behavioral health diagnosis and treatment for children and youth from early childhood through adolescence;
5. Early and appropriate diagnosis and treatment for children and adolescents that is family focused and community-based;
6. Access to safe and stable housing for people with behavioral health challenges, including those who are chronically homeless;
7. Effective re-entry planning and follow-up for people released from both behavioral health hospitalization and the criminal justice system;
8. Problem solving or specialty courts, including mental health and drug courts, in all judicial districts to provide needed treatment and avoid inappropriate entry into the criminal justice system;
9. Health education—from early childhood throughout life—that integrates all aspects of social, emotional, and physical health and wellness; and
10. Efforts to decrease the stigmatization of, and normalize, behavioral health problems and care. p.8

This report is submitted by MaryLee Moulton, Chair, Reimagining Public Safety Study.